

A DISCOURSE

ON THE DEATH OF

PRESIDENT LINCOLN,

Prenched in the Orthodox Congregational Church,

IN DEDHAM,

BY

THE REV. SAMUEL B. BABCOCK,

IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REQUEST OF A COMMITTEE OF
CITIZENS.

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Wednesday, April 19, 1865.  
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DEDHAM, MASS.:

PRINTED BY JOHN COX, Jr.

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G. I. R.

Correspondence.

TO THE REV. SAMUEL B. BABCOCK :

At a meeting of the Committee of Arrangements of the citizens of Dedham, held April 22, 1865—

Voted,—That the thanks of the Committee be presented to the Rev. Samuel B. Babcock, for his able, appropriate and patriotic Discourse, on the occasion of the funeral solemnities in honor of the late President of the United States ; and that he be solicited to furnish a copy thereof for publication.

(Signed)	I. CLEVELAND, ELIPHALET STONE, A. B. GALUCIA, WM. BULLARD, L. H. KINGSBURY,	} Committee.
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[REPLY.]

Chestnut Street, April 25, 1865.

To I. Cleveland, Eliphalet Stone, A. B. Galucia, and others, Esqrs. :

Gentlemen,—Your kind note, expressing approval of my poor labors on the 19th inst., (a historical day in the annals of our land, as the anniversary of the blood shed at Lexington in 1775, at Baltimore in 1861, and of the burial of Abraham Lincoln,) is received, and in reply to your courteous request, I place the manuscript in your hands.

Yours, very truly,

SAMUEL B. BABCOCK.



DISCOURSE.

2 Sam. 19th, 2d: "THE VICTORY THAT DAY WAS TURNED INTO MOURNING."

THIS was the day anticipated for a great rejoicing in the land. Every thing pointed towards it. The nation's struggle was well nigh ended. The soil had been fully saturated with human blood. The earth had been upturned enough for human graves. The costly sacrifice of life was nearly finished. Widowed wives and orphaned children were to be multiplied no more. The thunders of artillery were no longer to shake the land. The weary marchings, the assaults and charges, the fearful carnage of the battle-field, the groans of the wounded, the convulsions of the dying, the anxious fears of those whose loved ones were in the strife of battle, the funereal gloom that lay like a pall over the land—these were all so nearly overpast, that men began to breathe freely, in the long-deferred hope that Peace was not a great ways off.

But a few days ago we spread forth our banners to the breeze, that the sun might smile on the *stars*; we poured forth salvos of artillery; our night we turned into day, by making our dwellings radiant with other light than that the

sun gave ; music and speech were heard in our public places ; friends grasped the hands of friends,—and all were friends, though they had never met before ;—never was there a better augury for a day of Thanksgiving and Praise than this *was* to have been, so far as *man could judge*. But man is as short-sighted as the mole that burrows beneath the earth. “ He knows not what a day may bring forth.” But last Friday night we all went to our rest in peace, looking for a happy dawn to renew our joy and prepare for the jubilee so near at hand. But while we calmly slept, there were messages on the wire of hot woe, that well might melt the iron strands—that the tidings should never reach the ears of the people. But come they did ; and when the next day’s sun arose, and our citizens were again rejoicing in hope, it was like an electric bolt from Heaven—the tidings that had travelled through the night—that the Head of this great Nation was stricken down into the ceaseless silence of death,—stricken down just as his heart was most elate with joy ;—stricken down just as he was “ devising those liberal things ” which his great and loving heart exulted in ;—stricken down just at the moment when he was ready for his crowning work of readjusting all the disturbed elements of the land, so that all parts thereof, North and South, East and West, might be reconsolidated into an Union that could never again be severed, and upon principles so generous, so pure, so righteous, that every patriot would be glad, and all the land should shout for joy ;—stricken down just as he had conquered all prejudices, secured all confidence, and stood, as he deserved to stand, the foremost man before all the nation—the foremost man by the verdict of *foreign*

powers, who *were forced* into the confession, against every wish of their heart, that for judgment, for sagacity, for comprehensiveness, the State-writings of Abraham Lincoln were models for any government, and of which any statesman might be proud.

But *how* did he fall? Ah! there comes the bitterness of the woe. Had he been laid upon a bed of sickness, with fever raging through his veins; had his great intellect been stilled by that fearful malady which overtakes a brain o'ertasked; had all the skill of the medical art been used and failed; had the storms of Heaven made the boisterous sea swallow down the ship as he went out to confer with his Generals on the matter of the war, just as the rival capital of the rebellious States was to be reduced to allegiance to the laws, or be destroyed from among the cities of the earth—then, though we should have said: “The ways of God are inscrutable, past finding out,” yet we should have bowed the head in sorrow, and said, reverently: “It is the Lord, and though He slay, we will trust in Him.” We were not permitted, in the hidden mystery of the wisdom of God, to enjoy even this poor consolation.

The good Washington breathed out his life calmly in an honored retirement from the pressing cares of public duty, after he had conducted the nation safely through (amid appalling discouragements) the great war of our Revolution.

The elder Adams died in a good old age, just fifty years after he had signed our Magna Charta, the Declaration that “these United States are free, sovereign and independent;” died peacefully in the quiet of his home.

Jefferson departed peacefully in the land for which he had *penned* that noble instrument, which we have sealed a second time with the nation's blood.

Madison died "as serene, philosophical, calm, in the last moments of his existence, as he had been in all the trying occasions of his life."

James Monroe had no violence in his death.

Harrison occupied the Presidential chair but a single month, and then passed away amid the consolations of Religion;—said a passing word for his country, and laid down to die, contentedly.

Jackson, the brave, the undaunted, "expired at his home with calmness, and expressed the highest confidence in a happy immortality, through the Redeemer."

John Quincy Adams died suddenly but composedly in the very capitol, passing away, as many deem it a blessing to die, without the pains of sickness or the infirmities of age.

James K. Polk died in his home after he had laid aside the responsibilities of office.

Taylor said kind parting words to soothe the anguish of his friends.

All other Presidents that departed this life died without violence; but it was reserved for one whose name must necessarily outrank all but that of Washington; it was reserved for Abraham Lincoln—loved not less than any, honored not less, confided in not less,—to die by the accursed hand of assassination, with a suddenness so fearful that he could give no parting look, speak no parting word, hear not the wails of sorrow, feel not the hand of affection

on his brow, hear not the prayer at his bedside, know not the friends that bended over him, and send upwards no prayer like that of the first Christian martyr: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." For he, we mourn to-day, was a martyr as much as ever Latimer and Ridley, Wickliff and Huss, were martyrs—a martyr in the cause of high-minded patriotism; in the cause of human freedom; a man, a magistrate as true to his country as is the needle to the pole. But still we say, "Thy will be done;" for the Lord has His own thoughts, His own ways, which are not as our ways, nor as our thoughts.

Was it meant to nerve the Nation's heart to greater fortitude? Was it needed to show us how virulent the poison mixed in Rebellion's Circean cup? Alas! alas! it savors but too much of that foul spirit which has kept the land in tumult for long and painful years.

It goes back to the day when one who had once occupied the Presidential chair, and afterwards was known as "the old man eloquent," received from the South this graceful communication, "a lithograph portrait of himself, with the picturesque annotation of a rifle ball on the forehead, and a promise that such a remedy 'would stop his music.'"

It goes back to the days when an honorable Judge of your own State was driven from the streets of a Southern city that had not chivalry enough to defend the weak, and in which it was averred—"they dared not be responsible for the protection of his life."

It goes back to the day when a Massachusetts Senator, sitting at his desk in the chamber of the capitol, was felled to the floor, like an ox by a butcher's hand.

It reminds us of Kansas, filled with New England's men and women honoring that Border State, but ransacked and burned, and her brave citizens murdered, with a malignity and low grovelling cruelty such as we once supposed could be found only in the Pacific Isles when this century began.

It reminds us of the glee with which a brave and fearless man, excited to unlawful acts by the manifold wrongs he suffered, was hunted down and captured like a wild beast, and then sacrificed with all the pomp and circumstance of war, as if in that execution of one poor freeman, they had destroyed the very life of freedom.

It reminds us of the low stratagem of sending forth our diminutive fleet to every coast except our own, that the cunning and crafty ones might the more safely pillage cities and mints, forts and arsenals, and all the public property that lay within the reach of their pilfering hands.

It reminds us of the gnashing of teeth when a brave officer, four years ago, transported his command from an insecure fort on the land to a safer one built up out of the depths of the sea, and named for one of the honored men in the war of the Revolution.

It reminds us of four years of barbaric cruelty to captured prisoners of war, compelling them to herd in pens, without shelter from the sun at noon, or frost at night; compelled to eat and to drink what the very swine in our streets would reject; allowing them to die uncared for, as if they were brute beasts and not men; bayoneting the wounded, and carving the very bones of our brave dead soldiers into rings and charms, and *boasting* of all these things as if they were right and proper.

It reminds us of base incendiarism of public hotels, where a conflagration would destroy the lives of thousands of helpless women and children, mingling the ashes of mortality with the ashes and debris of wood and stone.

It reminds us of large rewards offered to such as would bring, dead or alive, into their own possession, distinguished civilians and warriors, who were the more prominent supporters of the laws of the land they had so wickedly abjured.

And more, surely, we need not say, to show how the spirit of foul rebellion will incite to deeds of such black atrocity as ally men to demons, making them infuriate with rage. And with all these facts, would it pass the bounds of *Christian* charity to suspect that behind the assassins who designed a wholesale murder of the most prominent and most important men of the land—President and Vice-President; the Secretary of State and the Secretary of War; the General of all our forces in the field or in the camp—does it pass the bounds of Christian charity to fear, at least, that behind the assassins were sustainers leagued together, perhaps by a vow, to wreak their hatred by the lowest meanness of which depravity is capable?

While we bend over the grave waiting to receive all that is mortal of Abraham Lincoln, we cannot easily force these thoughts back from our mind. The question will come—how came the noble victim, the noblest victim of the land, so basely stricken down? Mere private revenge would hardly risk the danger of such a daring deed. Besides, what means that strange meeting of strange men, who deport themselves not as ordinary carousers, but who have mys-

terious whisperings, and join hands at parting, as if there were a secret plot, and a secret pledge, to do that which none besides themselves might know the secret of? With my hand upon my heart, I fear me much that, failing in resort to arms, failing in attempts to burn our cities to the ground, *failing in all things*, and desperate in defeat, the last resort is to murder, as best they can, all the leaders of the nation, to prepare the way for a new uprising of such as have been trained in a school where human life is little worth. If it be so—if they are given over to a mind so reprobate—we can only say, in this hour of the nation's sadness, that the conspirators, few or many, have slain their best friend; and, moreover, that they have waked up a determination, that will never sleep, that our country's honor shall be sustained if it cost ten lives where we have given one, and all the treasure that the land can furnish.

Over the now sacred remains of the dead, tens of thousands of hesitating patriots resolve that, under God, they will, not revenge the fall, but will purify the land, maintain the supremacy of its laws, vindicate its honor, and make it what it can be made and will be made, the chiefest among the nations of the earth. That humbled flag on Sumter “stooped to conquer.” It has risen again with a meaning and a glory and a moral power it never had before, and all its stars shall burn in brighter splendor, and new stars shall multiply, and it shall wave over us, the nation's emblem, as the Banner of the Cross waves over us, the emblem of the kingdom that is over all the kingdoms of the world.

But it will not be by man's might or power. Have you not seen how God has taken the cause into His own hands?

Has He not led us, by a way we knew not, through all the eventful struggle by which the nation is to have its new birth? Nearly every great plan of *our* devising has failed; nearly every great man we trusted in has fallen or retired. Our successive hopes, one after another, have perished. Our intended pacifications have never been effected. All things have disappointed us, even to the taking away our strong staff, that is now broken and lost; and yet to-day the land is stronger, the resources are more ample, the finances are actually sounder, than when the war began. So that in our great sorrow—with this our severest blow of all—with the loss that almost seems irreparable, we may still believe that the Lord hath a favor unto us—that He will be gracious unto our land—that when the Lord chastens it is in love; that He will, in his own good time, turn our mourning into joy, as He has turned our joy into mourning; and that after the grief of this calamity is overpast, we shall send forth the shout of victory, “of a people saved by the Lord, the shield of our help, and the sword of our excellency.”

But with all this glad hope and sure confidence for the future, we will not forget to weep with those who weep to-day, with an agony that no human sympathy can relieve. A widow mourns for one dearer than the apple of her eye. Children mourn for a fond and honored father, who had a child's heart for gentleness and simplicity, for one whose spirit was as playful as their own. Men grave in council, men of high trusts and weighty responsibilities are in tears, at this passing moment, while they stand around the bier of the great departed.

The solemn sound of prayer ascends to call a blessing down upon that stricken wife—upon the fatherless—upon the associates of the illustrious dead, who had taken counsel together these many years; to call a blessing down upon all the people of the land—a prayer that God will sanctify the nation's great sorrow to the nation's great good; and that it may be established in true holiness and righteousness—such righteousness that war can never again prevail, as long as the two great oceans that bound it shall ebb and flow upon its coasts. That house of mourning is a solemn place, while we are gathered here. Beside the voice of supplication, the low dirge reminds that Death is there; and beside the dirge and prayer, and heavy sobs, and raining eyes, there is all the drapery of woe, the sable curtaining, the ivy wreaths, that show and teach that what is appointed unto all men “once to die,” has come to pass for one loved and honored, and it is he who fell by foul murder's hand, raised at fouler Treason's instigation. Weep we then with those who weep. It is no shame that tears run to-day. It were a greater shame if the fountains were sealed, so that the streams *could* not flow, till the very eyes were dim.

“These are gracious drops;” these our tears the best tribute we can pay to-day to the memory of the great, the good, the wise, the honest, the true, the tender-hearted, the forgiving, and the Christian magistrate that honored God, and sought his guidance for his life's control.

My friends and neighbors, some of us have spanned o'er many years, and have known something of this nation's history, and have seen days of gloom, when fear prevailed more than hope, but none of us have ever seen a day of

deeper sadness than this. We shall not learn its lesson well unless the nation is humbled under the mighty hand of God. We must bow before the majesty of God, who casts down the high looks of the proud, that out of the dust of humility He may lift up the fallen into a new and stronger life. He disciplines *nations* as He disciplines *men*. If *man* must enter Heaven, through much tribulation, so must a *people* also. God scourgeth every one whom he receiveth. He smites that He may heal. He hath smitten us sorely, but He has not given us, as a people, over unto death, nor will He so long as we put our trust in Him.

Blessed be the name of God, that he hath given us so much, and favored us so long before He took away the staff on which we, perhaps, leaned too confidently.

Turn we a moment from the dead to the living, glancing, as we turn our eyes, into that darkened room, where a sufferer lies, at whom Treason struck so audaciously. How nearly did the second man in power, of this great nation, fall under the same traitorous blow that laid the first in death. One could not suffice. Nay! every day will reveal, we dare to prophesy, that scarcely one *was to be spared*, of all the heads of the Departments of State—in civil, judicial, or military life. God heal those gaping wounds, that were meant to be as fatal as the lead that struck the Leader down. But there is another living, or, we may trust is living, who needs all the sympathies and all the prayers that heart and soul can give—the successor of him who is now being borne to the house appointed for all the living—one who, in the present crisis, succeeds as much to danger as to toil and honor;—a man solemnly resolved to do his duty to his

country as faithfully as he *has* done it, and as fearlessly, too;—a man who stands in his place to-day by the providence of God, and not of his own seeking. God grant that “as his day is, so his strength may be.”

Be it our's less as patriots than as Christians to hold his arms up by our prayers, till the remembrance of Amalek be utterly put out from under Heaven—till Rebellion, which is as the sin of witchcraft—till Treason, which springs up from beneath—till Sedition and privy Conspiracy shall cease to exist, from the Lake to the Gulf, from the great sea eastward to the great sea westward, and this whole country be established in righteousness, a people fearing the Lord.

A land in sable, and a land in tears! The air rocked, over the whole country, with the mournful sound of tolling bells! A land pale with indignation at the most atrocious crime that has ever yet been perpetrated within its boundaries! A land stirred to its soul's inmost centre, *that it shall be free!*

“The victory to-day turned into mourning;” but so we are true to God, and listen to his instructive voice, echoed back from the grave of the great departed, ere long our mourning shall be turned back again into a subdued and holy joy; tears wiped from every eye; symbols of victory on every high hill, and every mast and every steeple. Thanksgiving and melody in every consecrated Temple, at every street corner, in every palace and every cabin of the land; a land with none but free and freedmen; a land that God shall greatly bless, if we put our trust in Him.

A Prayer.

O, most mighty God, terrible in thy judgments, and wonderful in thy doings towards the children of men ; who, in thy heavy displeasure, didst suffer the life of the President of these United States to be taken away by the hands of cruel and bloody men ; we, Thy sinful creatures here assembled before Thee, do, in behalf of all the people of this land, humbly confess that they were the crying sins of this nation which brought down this heavy judgment upon us.

But, O gracious God, when thou makest inquisition for blood, lay not the guilt of this innocent blood, lay it not to the charge of the people of this land ; nor let it ever be required of us or our posterity. Be merciful, O Lord ; be merciful to Thy people whom Thou hast redeemed ; and be not angry with us forever, but pardon us for Thy mercies' sake, through the merits of Thy Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

NOTES TO PAGES SEVEN AND EIGHT.

John Quincy Adams, while defending "the right of petition," and exposing the preponderance of the Slave interests over those of the North, frequently received threatening letters, the effect of which was to nerve him to a higher bravery. His lightning scathed remorselessly the vaunting pride of those who hoped to still the potency of his voice.

Judge Hoar visited Charleston to defend a colored sailor who had been thrust into prison, with the prospect of being sold into irretrievable bondage. The judge was exposed to the danger of losing his life, and was rather hustled than conducted out of the city.

Charles Sumner was writing at his desk, when but few were in the Senate Chamber, and Brooks, of the House of Representatives, from South Carolina, stole behind him stealthily and struck a murderous blow, the effects of which were so serious as to threaten life, or a deprivation of intellect worse than death. Happily, Sumner lives. Brooks died long ago.

John Brown made an unwise but bold incursion into Harper's Ferry, creating an alarm that was wholly unwarranted by the facts, and was hunted down by the Virginians with an earnestness far exceeding the importance of the case, and provoking the ill-feeling of many not by any means in sympathy with the raider.

The seizure of mints, forts and arsenals, the Floyd diplomacy, the designed assassination of President Lincoln in 1861, and the subsequent acts of cruelty at Anderson, Belle Isle, and the Libby Prison, are familiar to all who have watched the progress of the war.

